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ABSTRACT

This report describes a plan that was developed for improving middle school student writing skills and attitudes toward writing. The targeted population consisted of seventh and eighth graders in a low to middle class community located in western Illinois. The problems of weak writing skills, ineffective use of the writing process, and poor attitudes toward writing were documented through writing samples, teacher observation of student writing habits, and teacher and student surveys. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students were unmotivated to use the writing process and lacked a cognitive awareness of the purpose for the writing process. Reviews of instructional strategies revealed little emphasis on revision skills instruction and offered students no "real world" purpose for writing. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three major categories of intervention: providing real world purposes for writing; implementing a change in the amount and quality of instructional strategies related to the writing process; and emphasizing metacognitive strategies related to the writing process. Analysis of post-intervention data indicated a positive increase in student attitudes toward writing in school and as a lifelong skill. Students also improved their use of the writing process, particularly revision. (Contains 5 tables of data, 1 figure, and 12 references; various sample forms are appended, including survey forms and self evaluation forms.) (Author/CR)

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IMPROVING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT WRITING SKILLS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD WRITING

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a plan for improving middle school student writing skills and their attitudes toward writing. The targeted population consisted of seventh and eighth graders in a low to middle class community located in western Illinois. The problem of weak writing skills, ineffective use of the writing process, and poor attitudes toward writing was documented through writing samples, teacher observation of student writing habits, and teacher and student surveys.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students were unmotivated to use the writing process and lacked a cognitive awareness of the purpose for the writing process. Reviews of instructional strategies revealed little emphasis on revision skills instruction and offered students no real world purpose for writing.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three major categories of intervention: providing real world purposes for writing, implementing a change in the amount and quality of instructional strategies related to the writing process and emphasizing metacognitive strategies related to the writing process.

Analysis of post intervention data indicated a positive increase in student attitudes toward writing in school and as a life long skill. Students also improved their use of the writing process, particularly revision.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT....1

General Statement of the Problem....1

Immediate Problem Context....1

The Surrounding Community....3

National Context of the Problem....5

CHAPTER 2 - PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION....7

Problem Evidence....7

Probable Causes....8

CHAPTER 3 - THE SOLUTION STRATEGY....10

Literature Review....10

Project Objectives and Processes....14

Project Action Plan....14

Methods of Assessment....17

CHAPTER 4 - PROJECT RESULTS....19

Historical Description of the Intervention....19

Presentation and Analysis of Results....22

Conclusions and Recommendations....26

REFERENCES....30

APPENDIXES....31

APPENDIX A.....32

APPENDIX B.....33

APPENDIX C.....35

APPENDIX D.....36

APPENDIX E.....37

APPENDIX F.....38

APPENDIX G.....39

APPENDIX H.....40

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

In a language arts curriculum program there was collaboration between a seventh grade teacher with nine years experience and an eighth grade teacher with eight years experience. Initially, they taught basic grammar and usage with a skill and drill approach; subsequently, their students produced very little writing. Over a period of five years, they implemented writers' workshop with an emphasis on process writing. As the quantity of student writing increased, there was no measurable improvement in quality. The researchers were concerned that the students in the targeted classes mechanically progressed through the stages of the process with little thought toward producing a polished end product. Although students were required to draft, revise, and edit, they implemented few changes on their own and were ineffective as peer editors and revisors. Evidence for existence of the problem included surveys in which students admitted skipping steps of the writing process, teacher observation of ineffective writing habits, writing process samples, and a survey (Appendix A) of language arts teachers within the targeted school.

Immediate Problem Context

The program was implemented at a middle school in the Quad City metropolitan area. The targeted school had an enrollment of approximately 1,100 students in grades five through eight. The racial and ethnic background of the student population was 72.1% White, 10.0%

African American, 15.1% Hispanic and 2.1% Asian Pacific Islander. The percentage of low-income students in the school was 29.4. The percentage of students who attended school every day was 94.1. There was a chronic truancy rate of 6.6%. A chronic truant is a student who is absent from school without valid cause for 10% or more of the 180 school days. The student mobility rate was 31.3%. Student mobility rate is based on the number of students who enroll in or leave a school during the school year. Students may be counted more than once.

Average class size is the total enrollment for a grade divided by the number of classes for that grade reported for the first school day in May. Average class size for fifth grade was 27, sixth was 26.4 students, seventh was 28.2, and eighth was 27.5 students. Time devoted to the teaching of core subjects is the average number of minutes of instruction per 5-day school week in each subject area divided by 5. The targeted school devoted 44 minutes per day to math, science and social studies and 88 minutes per day to language arts. In addition to their core subjects, fifth graders have physical education class daily. Sixth through eighth grades have an exploratory class daily. Their exploratory classes are art, computers, communications technology, Quest, Spanish, and home and family living. Students attend each exploratory class for six weeks. Six through eighth graders involved in band take that class in place of an exploratory class. Eligible students can receive Title I reading instruction, gifted instruction, and bilingual instruction. Every student attends an Advisor Advisee class weekly for a half-hour. Advisor Advisee is a developmental guidance program focusing on life skills.

There are many extra-curricular programs. At-risk students in grades five through seven can attend an after school tutoring program Mondays through Thursdays. Interscholastic basketball, wrestling, volleyball and track are available to seventh and eighth grade boys and girls. Intramural sports are open to fifth and sixth grade girls and boys. Students Taking a Right

Stand (S.T.A.R.S) is a group open to students who want to participate in alcohol and drug free activities. Members learn ways to cope with negative peer pressure. Membership is open to fifth through eighth graders. The counseling department trains a number of fifth through eighth graders to be conflict mediators. Drama and chorus are available to students who wish to participate before or after school.

Teacher and administrator information is based on full-time equivalents. Teachers include all school personnel whose primary responsibility is listed as that of classroom teacher on the State Teacher Service Record File. There were 77 teachers, 3 counselors, 3 administrators, and 3 nurses at the targeted school. The racial ethnic background of the teachers was 95.2% White, 1.8% African American, 1.8% Hispanic and 1.2% Asian Pacific Islander. Females comprised 85.1% of the staff and males 14.9%. The pupil-teacher ratio was 19.7:1. The pupil-administrator ratio was 249.7:1. Teachers had an average of 15 years of experience in the field. The percentage of teachers with bachelor's degrees was 64 and with master's degrees was 36. The average teacher salary for the 1995-96 school year was $37,988. The average administrator salary was $66,304. The district's operating expenditure per pupil was $5,010.

The Surrounding Community

The targeted middle school is located in a community of slightly over 20,000 residents. It is a part of a larger community known as the Quad Cities.

The community is primarily a manufacturing center. Of 15,325 jobs within the city, 11,100 are industrial in nature, 3,250 are non-industrial (business, service) related, and 975 are government jobs. Over 75% of resident workers are employed outside the city; however, over 97% of employed persons are working within the greater Quad Cities region.

The median household income in 1989 was $24,746. The vast majority of residents fell in the low to middle income ranges. Less than 3% of all households had incomes $60,000 or greater.

Nearly 84% of the population was White, slightly over 8.4% was African American, and nearly 10% was of Hispanic origin. Although many Mexican Americans have been in the Quad Cities area for several generations, others have come from Mexico more recently. Many who have recently arrived from Mexico have limited English speaking abilities.

The community has the unique situation of having separate districts for its elementary schools and high school. The targeted school is part of an elementary district containing four elementary schools and a middle school. Administration positions include a superintendent, assistant superintendent of business, assistant superintendent of curriculum, and a coordinator of special services.

The total 1995-96 school year enrollment was 2,639. The racial and ethnic background reported on September 29,1995, was 68.9% White, 15.6% Hispanic, 13.2% African American, 1.9% Asian Pacific Islander, and 0.4% Native American. Students from low income families comprised 31.1% of the district's population, and 4.9% were considered limited English proficient making them eligible for bilingual education. The district reported a 94.6% attendance rate and a student mobility rate of 29.2% (compared to a state mobility rate of 18.8%). The chronic truancy rate was 3.5%.

In response to low scores on the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) reading test, the district contracted with Illinois State University to conduct a study of reading strategies used by teachers. The district reading study was conducted from February through April 1997.

On April 1, 1997, the district failed in its attempt to gain community support in passing a $9.9 million bond referendum. Voters rejected the proposal 57% to 43%. Major renovations of the district school buildings have not occurred during the past three decades. Unsatisfactory conditions include: seven classes being taught in mobile classroom facilities, severely undersized libraries, inadequate physical education facilities, temporary partitions dividing classrooms, and electrical service which does not accommodate the use of multiple computers in classrooms. In addition, changes must be made to meet the handicap accessibility requirements mandated by the federal government. Another referendum was defeated in November 1997.

National Context of the Problem

As many language arts teachers change from direct grammar instruction to process-oriented writing instruction, there is still the concern that students are unable to apply knowledge of standard writing conventions and revision strategies in their work. Steinlage (1990) observed that her students were not learning to edit their own work; instead, they were relying on her. She stated, "My students were not able to complete the process by producing a polished piece of writing on their own. They needed me to finish their writing" (Steinlage, 1990, p.60).

The problem of students' inability to revise and peer edit is a national concern. Neubert and McNelis (1986) validated this statement by citing a national survey of 560 otherwise successful secondary teachers of writing and 715 of their students. Freedman's (1985) survey found that many teachers were unsatisfied with the use of peer-response groups because they had difficulty getting students to respond effectively to one another's writing.

Paramount to students' problems with peer editing and revising is their inability to improve their own writing. In The Art of Teaching Writing, Calkins echoed this concern: "...children often do not know what revision is. Often they write successive drafts, each with

only a peripheral connection to the one before it or to their notebook entries. Equally often they write successive entries and drafts, each almost identical to the next save for a few insertions, deletions, or corrections" (1994, p.208). Many students fail to perceive revision as a chance to improve their writing. To them, revision equals correction (Lehr, 1995)

In spite of increased efforts to use the writing process, many students are still reluctant to take the necessary steps to improve their writing. Henkin (1996, p.14) lamented, "How can we get students to revise and publish? Why don't they? Why don't they know how?" Perhaps basic writers don't revise and publish because they haven't been made aware of the thought processes writers use when developing a paper (Whitworth,1987). Routman stated that writing has become a mechanized process containing "all the how's without the why's" (1994, p.165). She believes the writing process cannot work without a teacher's conviction to make it important for students. If teachers expect students to see the significance of writing in their lives, they must provide students with real world reasons to write.

Lack of student motivation and cognitive awareness of the purpose of the writing process is a concern of writing teachers nationwide. In addition, lack of effective writing instruction and real world purpose for writing is a problem encountered in writing classrooms all over the United States.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Existence of the problem was verified through an informal survey (Appendix A) of ten language arts teachers at the targeted school. When the teachers were asked how many of their students were effective editors of their own writing, 60% reported none or very few. In the area of revision, once again, 60% of the teachers expressed concern that their students were ineffective revisors of their own writing. One seventh grade teacher said that once students have written something, they have ownership and do not want to make changes. They lack motivation and do not see the need for change. The remaining 40% felt that only after teacher conferences were students able to revise effectively. A majority of the teachers concurred that very few of their students were effective peer revisors. On the other hand, 60% of the teachers stated that their students achieved more success as peer editors because editing someone else's writing is less personal. One teacher suggested that peer editing improved after instruction. Over half of the teachers agreed that their students move through the writing process without giving much thought to the purpose for each step.

Teachers were also asked how much revision was evident in student writing from rough draft to final copy. Half the teachers said that very little change was evident; whereas, the other half noted moderate to adequate change.

When teachers were asked what their students generally focused on when they did make changes in their writing, they said spelling, punctuation, word changes, fixing run-on sentences, and varying sentence structure. The general consensus was that the focus was on mechanics rather than content; more editing than revising took place. Two teachers denoted laziness as a contributing factor. Given the problem as stated in Chapter 1, additional information based on teacher observations and student performance was necessary.

Probable Causes

A review of the professional literature suggested several reasons for students' failure to use the writing process to improve the quality of their writing. A very worrisome cause and one that most teachers have encountered is a lack of student motivation to use the writing process. Lindsey stated the problem aptly when she said, "Many students when confronted with reading and writing in the English classroom begrudgingly ask 'Do we have to?'" (1996, p.103).

Another possible cause for students' failure to use the writing process effectively is that they lacked a cognitive awareness of the purpose of the writing process. Students are taught the steps of the writing process but teachers often neglect the metacognitive aspect of writing instruction. Good writing and good thinking are linked. Before, during, and after writing, students need opportunities to think about the how's and why's of their writing habits and what writing strategies worked or did not work for them. If students are not afforded ample opportunity to reflect on their writing habits, they will continue to see revision not as an opportunity to develop and improve a piece of writing but as an indication that they failed to do it right the first time (Lehr, 1995). Use of metacognitive strategies in writing instruction may move students from correctors to revisors.

A failure to adapt writing instruction to individual student needs may be another reason students move mechanically through the writing process. As is true with all academic endeavors,

each person's writing process is unique. Whole class writing instruction often assumes that all students use the writing process the same way. Henkin (1996) warned against teaching what works for us or only teaching the way we were taught in school.

Students often view writing as something done in English class for their teacher's eyes only. They do not see the bigger picture. They do not see the need for writing as a lifelong skill. Teachers may inadvertently exacerbate the problem by not providing opportunities for students to make their work public. Writing is assigned, assessed, and returned with little or no occasion for sharing or publishing. When publication does occur it is often at the end of the school year when there is little time left for students to learn from the experience. Calkins summed it up nicely when she wrote that "All too often in our classrooms, publication happens once, in the final months of the school year. What a waste it is to postpone author's celebrations until the end of the year, when it's too late to use the momentum these occasions create" (1996, p. 266).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A search of literature unveiled numerous strategies and insights to help improve student writing. Increasing students' cognitive awareness of the purpose of the writing process, teaching revision strategies, and giving students real world reasons to write are soundly supported.

First of all, it is important that educators provide students with a setting that is conducive to writing. Writers' workshop provides the framework where student writers have the opportunity to try new techniques and find out what works for them (Henkin, 1996). Unfortunately, in many instances students and teachers emphasize the editing portion of the process, instead of focusing on ideas and what the writer is trying to communicate. Communication is the most important part of writing according to Cunningham (1988). Calkins (1994) advised that the teaching of strategies in the writing process classroom must begin with the students' personal reflections on the strategies they have already used. Then, with the teacher's help, they can speculate about new strategies in future writing.

Increasing students' cognitive awareness of strategies that work best for them is a necessary step in improving student writing. Atwell observed that adolescent writers depended on others to find and work out problems in their writing. This " 'I'm done, give me response' syndrome" (1987, p. 103) kept writers from their most significant readers--themselves. The

importance of self evaluation was reinforced by Murray (as cited in Lindsey, 1996) who compared writing to an inner conversation between two selves. One self speaks and makes, while the other self listens, considers, and evaluates. Through writing conferences, teachers can help students take a step back from their writing and be that "other self".

Helping students internalize the importance of the writing process requires an awareness of how the process should be used. Kutz and Roskelly (as cited in Lindsey, 1996) stated that writing is "an active, constructive process--a process that writers use not just to present 'right' answers in 'correct' formats, but to extend ways of using language to make sense of the world"(103). Flowers, in a study of the differences between skilled and unskilled writers (as cited in Calkins, 1994), maintained that skilled writers plan not only what they will say, but also what they will do. By planning, a writer is able to add prioritizing and organizing to their repertoire of problem-solving skills.

The writing process is different for everyone. A strategy that works for one writer might not work for another. One hazard in teaching writing is for educators to teach their personal preferences or the way they were instructed in school (Henkin, 1996). By changing the focus of instruction, writing can be changed "from a tiresome, mechanical activity to a thinking, problem-solving process" (Berliner & Casanova, 1996, p. 128). Latta (as cited in Lindsey, 1996) found that students internalized the writing process and discovered the strategies that worked best for them through the use of in-process journals. The journals were vehicles through which students could dialogue with themselves about trouble spots in a particular piece of writing and brainstorm possible solutions. In-process journals were records of students' thinking and gave them, not teachers, ownership of the problems associated with their writing.

In addition to increasing students' cognitive awareness of the purpose of the writing process, teaching the importance of revision can improve student writing. Both Routman (1994)

and Lehr (1995) described revision as the heart of the writing process. When revision is shown as just another step in the writing process, students hardly take it seriously. However, when revision is shown as a necessary part of what good writers do, students are capable of understanding and seeing the need for it (Routman, 1994). Revision, according to Routman, "requires careful attention and thinking and refers to any changes the writer makes in an attempt to improve clarity, organization, wording, fluency, and understanding" (1994, p. 165). More than the last stage of the process, Sommers (as cited in Lehr, 1995) saw revision as a process of changing one's writing throughout a draft consistent with one's changing intentions.

A 1977 NAEP study (as cited in Lehr, 1995) found that students' revision attempts in grades four, eight, and eleven resulted in changes in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The students equated revision with correction. Literature sources on revision strategies offer many suggestions for instructors to change student attitudes about revision. Calkins advised that "no one strategy is right for every child, and certainly no strategy could be right for every child on any given day" (1994, p. 211). She suggested that mini-lessons on various revision strategies would offer student writers a variety of options from which to choose. Students become risk takers in their writing when they are taught to anticipate revision. According to Cunningham (1988) student writers may not be aware that a careful, reflective reading is the first step in the revising process. Applebee's 1981 study (as cited in Holbrook, 1984) showed that the key elements in an effective writing lesson are active student roles, lack of teacher dominance, and writing that comes naturally out of other activities.

Adams (as cited in Lehr, 1995) stated that devoting more time to revision or simply requiring students to revise did not ensure writing improvement. Hillocks (as cited in Lehr, 1995) found that instruction focused on specific goals and skills produces positive results. His study noted improvement in the quality of writing produced by seventh and eighth graders.

When researchers Fitzgerald and Markham (as cited in Berliner & Casanova, 1996) began their study, they made the assumption that direct instruction of revision skills would improve students' writing. They found that those students who received specific instruction were able to target more areas in their writing that needed revision. These same students were more specific about the actual changes intended and made 42% more revisions than the control group. In addition, the researchers noted an improvement in the overall quality of the students' writing, whereas the control group was rated the same at the beginning and end of the study. The instructional methods used were focused and intense. The teachers chose one type of revision strategy and then explained, modeled, and guided the students through the revision process. Berliner and Casanova's commentary about this study said the most significant aspect was the shift in responsibility from teacher to student. This was achieved by teaching the students the necessary skills. The researchers did not want their students to view revision as "boring and punishing" (1996, p. 126). Rather, they guided students to view it as a problem-solving process in which writers detect inconsistencies between what is actually written and what they had in mind.

Giving students real world reasons to write is another major step to improving student writing. The publication of student writing can be a powerful motivation for revision. Balajthy (as cited in Lehr, 1995) discovered that student sharing of writing through hardback books, newspapers, newsletters, or oral presentations showed them the importance of quality writing, and that revision can bring quality to writing. Pride and incentive to produce good work are two other benefits of publication according to Lehr. Calkins (1994) regretted that in many classrooms author's celebrations were not held until the end of the year. She emphasized that teachers must give their student writers a sense of authorship in order to improve their skills. Children must see themselves as authors once writers' workshop has begun.

Students must view reading and writing in the classroom as an "enlightening and fulfilling experience" (Lindsey, 1996, p. 103) if we are to expect them to make these activities a part of their lives outside of school. According to Routman (1994) real writing does not involve skill sheets, exercises, and separate activities. Writing for real purposes must be the focus in a writing classroom. Berliner & Casanova (1996) reiterated this philosophy by advising that students will see writing as a useful tool only if assignments address their real needs.

Project Objective and Processes

As a result of increased instructional emphasis on the writing process, particularly revision, during the period of September 1997 to January 1998, the seventh and eighth grade students from the targeted classes will improve their writing skills and demonstrate a positive change in attitude toward writing as a lifelong skill, as measured by student surveys, writing samples, teacher observations and reviews of student process journals.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Provide more opportunities for student publication.
2. Invite published authors and other adult writers to visit the classes.
3. Implement changes in writing instruction.
4. Incorporate metacognitive strategies into the curriculum.

Project Action Plan

Over a period of 18 weeks, the researchers implemented the following activities in their writers' workshop curriculum:

Week 1:

1. Administer student survey You as a Writer (Appendix B) and tabulate results.
2. Conduct review and guided practice of writing process.
3. Students write narrative demonstrating use of the writing process.
4. Collect student narratives and assess using the Writing Sample Checklist (Appendix C).
5. Announce quarterly literary publication.

6. Students submit title choices for literary publication.

Week 2:

1. Activity What Writers Do (Appendix D) (Think-Pair-Share and create visual).
2. Students interview three adults using the Adult Writer Survey (Appendix E).
3. Formulate visual Adult Writers We Know based on student interviews.
4. Students submit possible titles for literary publication.

Week 3:

1. Introduce student writing process journal--My history as a writer.
2. Student writing process journal activity: Questions writers ask.
3. Activity: Questions writers ask. (think-pair-share).
4. Formulate handout with student responses to put in writing folders.
5. Students vote on title of literary publication.
7. Announce cover art contest for literary publication.

Week 4:

1. Revision skills lesson #1: Additions.
2. Revision skills lesson #2: Deletions.
3. Student writing process journal--What do you do when you revise?
4. Students share journal reflections.

Week 5:

1. Revision skills lesson #3: Changes.
2. Revision skills lesson #4: Sentence combining.
3. Student writing process journal reflection #3.
4. Celebrate Writing Day!

Week 6:

1. Author/Writer visit #1.
2. Student writing process journal reflection #4.
3. Activity: Different ways to publish your writing.
4. Cover art due.

Week 7:

1. Students select and polish piece for literary publication.
2. Student writing process journal reflection #5--What do you do when you edit?
3. Students share journal reflections.
4. Cover art for literary publication chosen.

Week 8:

1. Begin assembling literary publication.
2. Student writing process journal reflection #6.

Week 9:

1. Finish assembling and distribute literary publication.
2. Student writing process journal reflection #7.
3. Celebrate Writing Day! (Roundtable Reading)

Week 10:

1. Author/writer visit #2.
2. Student writing process journal reflection #8.

Week 11:

1. Student writing process journal reflection #9.

Week 12:

1. Student writing process journal reflection #10.

Week 13:

1. Celebrate Writing Day!
2. Student writing process journal reflection #11.

Week 14:

1. Author/writer visit #3.
2. Student writing process journal reflection #12.

Week 15:

1. Student writing process journal reflection #13.

Week 16:

1. Student writing process journal reflection #14.
2. Students select and polish piece for literary publication.
3. Celebrate Writing Day!

Week 17:

1. Begin assembling literary publication.
2. Student writing process journal reflection #15.

Week 18:

1. Administer student survey You as a Writer and tabulate results.
2. Collect and evaluate student writing samples.
3. Finish and distribute literary publication.
4. Assess student writing process journal.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the altered curriculum, a survey of student attitudes about writing was developed. The survey was administered prior to intervention and at the end of the 18-week research period. In addition, a writing checklist was developed and used to assess

students' writing samples. Over the 18 weeks, the researchers made random, informal observations of students' writing habits and monitored the students' writing process journals for evidence of improvement in writing skills through more effective use of the writing process, and changes in attitudes about writing as a lifelong skill.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve student writing skills and student attitudes toward writing as a lifelong skill. The interventions employed to effect the desired changes were offering more opportunities for student publication, inviting guest authors to speak to the targeted classes, implementing changes in writing instruction, and using metacognitive strategies to increase student awareness of the importance of the writing process and the value of writing as a lifelong skill.

The opportunities for student publication came in the form of a literary magazine and additional group share time in a unique setting. Two literary magazines were published over the course of the eighteen week project. During the second week of school, students were offered an opportunity to submit possible titles for the publication. These choices were voted on by the targeted classes, and the title Gator Graffiti was selected. Student artists were given the opportunity to submit original artwork for the cover. A deadline was set for the end of the quarter, and students could submit pieces written during that quarter. Students volunteered to edit and compile the magazine. The first Gator Graffiti was published and distributed during the tenth week of the project. The name remained the same both quarters, but a new cover design was selected. The second issue was published and distributed during the final week of the project,

which coincided with the end of the second quarter. The other opportunity for student publication was additional group shares in a coffee house format. Coffee House evolved from "Celebrate Writing Day" originally mentioned in the action plan. The Coffee House sessions were held once a month on Fridays. Desks were arranged in a circle, beverages were provided, and students could opt to read their writing aloud in a traditional coffee house atmosphere complete with a master of ceremonies, bongo drums, and finger snapping in lieu of applause. A total of five sessions took place over the duration of the project.

To emphasize the importance of writing as a lifelong skill, guest speakers were invited to share their writing experiences with the targeted classes. A newspaper columnist, television reporter, and local radio personality spoke to the students about the value of writing in their individual professions. In addition, a panel composed of two high school students, two college students, and two recent college graduates outlined their educational writing experiences and offered encouragement and advice to the audience.

Revision was targeted as an avenue to improve student writing, and changes in instruction came in the form of increased revision skill lessons. In order to establish a baseline, and assess the students' use of the writing process, particularly revision, students were required to write a personal narrative about one aspect of their summer vacation. Samples were evaluated using the Writing Sample Checklist. Subsequent whole group instruction included the following topics: adding specific details, writing effective leads, sentence combining, making writing clearer, and asking questions for more effective revision. Individual student conferencing included emphasis on the following revision strategies: deleting, moving information, making word changes, and using a thesaurus. The original plan called for the majority of the lessons to occur during the fourth and fifth weeks of the project. Once the school year began, a more realistic approach prevailed, and the lessons were spread out.

In order to increase student awareness of the importance of the writing process and to improve negative attitudes toward writing, several metacognitive strategies were employed. Initially, the You As a Writer survey was administered to establish a baseline. Students were questioned about their attitudes toward writing and their perceived use of the writing process.

Next, students completed a What Writers Do questionnaire. Students were given an individual response sheet and each question was also written on separate pieces of newsprint posted around the room. After completing the questionnaires, students wrote their answers on the newsprint. The group responses remained posted for several weeks.

In order to increase student awareness of the need for writing in adulthood, and to foster connections between classroom writing experiences and real life, students were required to interview three adults using the Adult Writers Survey. Adults were defined as anyone out of high school. Students were given one week to complete the assignment. After the first guest speaker, the adult writers surveys were placed on a table in the classroom and students were asked to select five. The results from the five surveys were compiled using the Adult Writers Survey Results form. As a culminating activity, students were directed to look at their results and reflect on what they had learned.

The original plan called for use of a writing process journal. The first entry was made in the fourth week. The topic was Questions Writers Ask. Responses were compiled and a copy was given to every student to keep in their writers' workshop folders. Consecutive weekly entries included the following questions: What do you do when you revise? What is the difference between editing and revision? and What is good writing? The original plan called for continued student reflection in the process journal; however, it became increasingly difficult to monitor these reflections in journal format. Therefore, the process journal was abandoned in the

eighth week, and the researchers chose to use a process sheet attached to student writing (Appendixes F and G).

Presentation and Analyses of Results

In order to assess student attitudes toward writing and their perceived use of the writing process, the You As a Writer survey was administered at the onset and conclusion of the project. These data were compiled and are presented in Tables 1-4.

Table 1

Comparison of Percentages of Students Responding to You as a Writer Survey

Rate How You Feel About Writing	5 High	4	3	2	1 Low
Preintervention	8	19	33	25	14
Postintervention	13	33	37	9	8

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect on how the students feel about writing. Prior to the intervention, 27% of the students rated their feelings about writing on the higher end of the scale; whereas, post intervention data indicated a 19% increase. Additionally, there was a 22% decrease in negative feelings about writing, as indicated by the number of responses in the lower two categories of the survey.

Table 2

Comparison of Percentages of Students Responding to You as a Writer Survey

Writing Has Purpose For My Life Beyond School	Agree	Disagree
Preintervention	74	24
Postintervention	83	17

An analysis of the survey results indicated a positive change in students' viewpoints

about the need for writing outside of the school setting. There was a 9% increase in the number of students who felt that writing had purpose for their lives beyond school.

Table 3

Comparison of Percentages of Students Responding to You as a Writer Survey

Based on Your Writing Experience, Rate the Value of Opinions and Advice	Not Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Very Helpful
Of Yourself			
Preintervention	6	63	31
Postintervention	5	53	43
Of Your Teacher			
Preintervention	3	36	62
Postintervention	1	39	62
Of Your Peers			
Preintervention	24	64	12
Postintervention	15	69	15

One portion of the survey assessed whether the students placed any value on peer feedback, teacher feedback, and their own self evaluation. Once again analysis of the survey results indicated a positive change. There was a 12% increase in the number of students who valued their own opinions and a 9% decrease in the number of students who felt their peers were of no help to them in their writing.

The You As a Writer survey was also used to assess students' perceived use of the writing process. The data related to revision were compiled and are presented in Table 4. An analysis of the survey results indicated that 8% more students thought they were making additions in their writing. Although there was no meaningful change in the students' perception in the amount of deletions or moving of information, there was a 7% increase in the number of students who felt they often made changes in their writing.

Table 4

Comparison of Percentages of Students Responding to You as a Writer Survey

When revising, do you take time to do the following?	Not Yet	Sometimes	Often
Additions			
Preintervention	10	55	35
Postintervention	2	57	41
Deletions			
Preintervention	8	57	35
Postintervention	7	60	33
Changes			
Preintervention	6	54	40
Postintervention	6	41	53
Moves			
Preintervention	12	60	28
Postintervention	15	57	27

In order to assess the effectiveness of Coffee House, Gator Graffiti, and the guest speakers on student attitudes toward writing, the Speak Out survey (Appendix H) was administered at the culmination of the project. These data were compiled and are presented in Figure 1. Coffee House had the most positive effect on students' attitudes toward writing. Close to half the students gave it the highest ranking. In terms of overall approval rating, all three interventions were effective: guest speakers, 79%; Coffee House, 86%; Gator Graffitti, 76%.

In order to assess whether the additional emphasis on revision and the increase in revision skill lessons had an effect on the amount of revision, writing samples were assessed at the beginning and the end of the project. Data were compiled and presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Comparison of Number and Types of Revisions Present in Writing Samples.

Number of Revisions	0	1-2	3-4	5-6
Type of Revision		September		
Additions	16	33	20	22
Deletions	48	34	8	1
Wording Changes	29	32	17	13
Arrangement Changes	75	12	4	0
Type of Revision		January		
Additions	33	30	15	13
Deletions	50	33	7	1
Wording Changes	35	35	19	2
Arrangement Changes	76	15	0	0

Note. Average length of writing samples was 1.5 pages.

Based on analysis of the writing samples, the interventions had little positive effect on the amount of revision. On the contrary, there was an increase in the number of students making no revision.

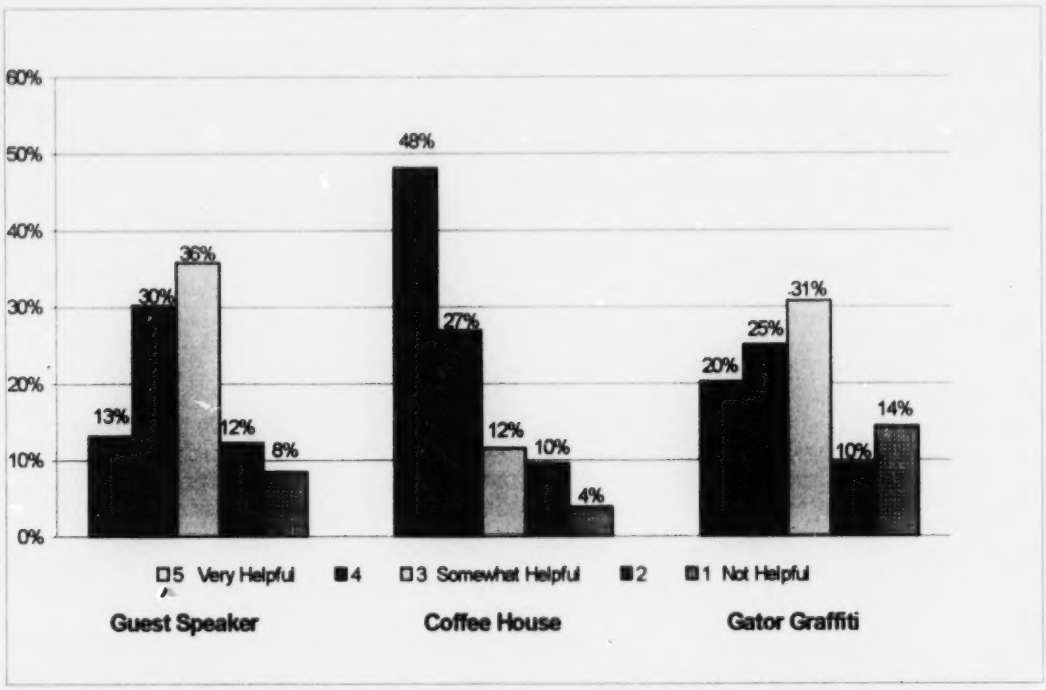

Figure 1. Comparison of effectiveness of activities on changing students' attitudes toward writing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the data presented, the interventions aimed at improving student attitudes toward writing were highly successful; however, the intervention related to improving student revision did not achieve the desired effect.

Even though the data did not indicate an increase in student revision, through informal observation and assessment of other writing during the 18 week project, the researchers noted that students were revising more on their own. At this point, there is no way to assess whether the observed increase in revision was due to the intervention or whether it would have happened as a normal outcome of writers' workshop and student maturation.

The researchers noted that the difference in atmosphere and circumstances for the post writing sample may have had a negative impact on the results. In contrast to writers' workshop,

where students were given choice and unrestricted time to develop a piece of writing, the writing sample was teacher directed and had a one week deadline. Another factor that may have contributed to poor revision performance on the writing sample was timing. The writing sample was assigned shortly after Christmas break as students were rushing to meet end of quarter deadlines in other classes. There was not enough time for students to take ownership of their writing. A more genuine way to have assessed revision would have been through student selection of a piece of writing. They could have been directed to choose a piece of writing done during the research period that exemplified their best revision effort.

An unexpected obstacle the researchers encountered in the beginning of the research project was the difficulty most students had understanding the difference between revision and editing. The researchers realized that educators should not assume that just because the writing process has been taught, that students will understand the subtle differences between the steps. Several weeks were spent using metacognitive strategies to help students become aware of revision and its importance in their writing. By the end of the research period, some transfer was noted. Students were overheard using the word revision correctly in their conversations about writing. One eighth grade student realized that an adult had misused the terms editing and revision in a response to the Adult Writers Survey. On random quizzes about the differences between editing and revision, an increasing number of students was able to distinguish between the two terms.

In the informal survey of language arts teachers conducted prior to the study, teachers mentioned that students are typically reluctant to make changes in their first drafts. An outcome noted by the researchers was that students became more willing to revise. For example, one seventh grade student had been near tears in September when asked to revise a piece. In January

this same student initiated revision on a lengthy story and enthusiastically talked about the need for change.

After study of the literature on student writing, the researchers recognized the need for giving students an audience and real world reasons for writing. Gator Graffiti and Coffee House provided that opportunity, as demonstrated by the number of favorable student responses on the Speak Out survey. In their written comments, students shared that they gleaned ideas and inspiration from Gator Graffiti and Coffee House. Some also wrote that they became more confident in their own writing abilities. Others were encouraged to write well because they had an audience.

Although Coffee House was popular with the students and served its purpose, the researchers recommend periodic group shares in a traditional workshop format. Coffee House was not the proper atmosphere for instructional feedback and peer advice because of the celebratory nature of the event.

A drawback of both Gator Graffiti and Coffeehouse was that shyer, less confident students were hesitant to share. Perhaps over time these students would become more willing to participate.

The project objective was to have students demonstrate a positive change in attitude toward writing as a life long skill. In addition to providing more opportunities for student publication and implementing changes in writing instruction, guest speakers were invited to share their writing experiences with the targeted classes. Students were also required to survey three adults about their writing habits and experiences. Both approaches were successful in helping the students make connections between classroom writing and the real world. In addition to an increase in the number of students who felt writing had purpose for their lives beyond school (Table 2), students reflected this attitude in their written comments. In their comments about the

adult writers surveys, students showed insight about the use of the writing process. Students realized that the adults wrote for many different purposes both on and off the job. Students also made note of the fact that most adults use a process approach to their writing, validating the need for learning the writing process in school.

While a more in depth study would be necessary, the researchers felt they had made progress in improving students' use of the writing process and had improved students' attitudes toward writing as a lifelong skill. The interventions provided a necessary link between the classroom and the real world. Increased awareness of the need for writing beyond school is a necessary step in a young writer's journey toward becoming a literate adult.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A
SURVEY OF TEACHER ATTITUDES ABOUT STUDENT WRITING

1. Are your students required to use the writing process?

Yes **No**

2. How many of your students are effective editors of their own writing?

None **Very Few** **Some** **Many**

3. How many of your students are effective revisors of their own writing?

None **Very Few** **Some** **Many**

4. How many of your students are effective peer editors?

None **Very Few** **Some** **Many**

5. How many of your students are effective peer revisors?

None **Very Few** **Some** **Many**

6. My students move through the writing process without giving much thought to the purpose for each step?

Agree **Disagree**

7. From first draft to final copy how much change is present in the average student's piece of writing?

No change

Very little change

Moderate change

Adequate change

8. When students make changes in their writing what do they generally focus on?

Appendix B
YOU AS A WRITER!

1. Rate how you feel about writing.

5	4	3	2	1
YEAH!		**CLAP, CLAP**		**BOO!**

2. Writing has purpose for my life beyond school. (circle one) **agree** **disagree**

3. Based on your writing experience, rate the value of the opinions and advice of the following:

YOURSELF	**not helpful**	**somewhat helpful**	**very helpful**
TEACHER	**not helpful**	**somewhat helpful**	**very helpful**
PEERS	**not helpful**	**somewhat helpful**	**very helpful**
PARENT	**not helpful**	**somewhat helpful**	**very helpful**
SIBLING	**not helpful**	**somewhat helpful**	**very helpful**

4. When writing, how often do you take time to do the following? (circle one)

PREWRITE	**not yet**	**sometimes**	**often**
EDIT (make changes in punctuation, capitalization and spelling)	**not yet**	**sometimes**	**often**
REVISE:			
-add words, sentences, and paragraphs	**not yet**	**sometimes**	**often**
-take out words, sentences, and paragraphs	**not yet**	**sometimes**	**often**
-change words, sentences, and paragraphs	**not yet**	**sometimes**	**often**
-move words, sentences, and paragraphs	**not yet**	**sometimes**	**often**

5. Do you write outside of the school setting? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

   If you answered **YES** to the above question, check all that apply:

   poetry_____ **diary or journal_____**

   stories_____ **letters (Notes to classmates don't count!)** _____

   other_____

6. List names and occupations of any adults you know personally who value writing in their jobs or personal lives.

   Name **Job**

Appendix C
WRITING SAMPLE CHECKLIST

Prewriting

Evident		Not Evident	

Editing Changes

	0	1-2	3-4	5-6
Spelling				
Capitalization				
Punctuation				
Grammar & Usage				

Revisions

	0	1-2	3-4	5-6
Additions				
Deletions				
Changes in Wording				
Changes in Arrangement				

Name: _____
Grade: _____
Period: _____
Date: _____

Appendix D
WHAT WRITERS DO!

1. What inspires you to write? (How do you get your ideas?)

2. When do you write best? (Time of day)

3. Describe the setting in which you write best. (Think about noise, work space, people.)

4. What tools have helped you as a writer? (References, supplies, etc.) Be specific.

5. List the reasons people write.

Appendix E
ADULT WRITER SURVEY

Name_____

Occupation_____

1. Do you write? **Yes** **No**

2. Have you ever written as part of your work? **Yes** **No**

   If **yes,** give an example of the kinds of writing.

3. Have you ever written for personal reasons? **Yes** **No**

   If **yes**, what kind of writing have you done?

4. What steps do you take when you write?

5. Do you think it's important to revise your writing? **Yes** **No**

   Why or why not?

6. Do you ever ask other people for help with your writing? **Yes** **No**

   Why or why not?

Appendix F

PROCESS SHEET

Author: _____

Title: _____

Type of Piece: _____

Purpose (Why are you writing this?) _____

Intended Audience: _____

Prewrite: Yes No **Read to the Wall: Yes No**

Revision conference with _____ **(signature)**

(These questions should be answered by conference partner)

1. **Praise (What did you specifically like about this piece?)**

2. **Question (What questions do you have as a reader? What don't you understand or where would you like to read more detail?)**

REVISION: Did you revise? Yes No

Add detail _____ **Take out** _____ **Change** _____ **Move** _____

Rate your amount of revision on a scale of 1-5: _____

EDITING: Did you check....

Paragraphs (indenting) _____ **Spelling** _____ **Punctuation** _____ **Grammar** _____

Rate your amount of editing on a scale of 1-5 _____

Teacher Comments: **Spelling Words:**

Appendix G

SELF-EVALUATION SHEET

NAME: _____

TITLE OF PIECE: _____

TYPE OF PIECE: _____

PURPOSE OF PIECE: (CIRCLE ONE) TO INFORM TO ENTERTAIN TO PERSUADE

REVISION CONFERENCE WITH _____(SIGNATURE)

THESE QUESTIONS SHOULD BE ANSWERED BY PEER CONFERENCE PARTNER.

1. **PRAISE (WHAT DID YOU SPECIFICALLY LIKE ABOUT THIS PIECE?)**

2. **QUESTION (WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE AS A READER? WHAT DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, OR WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO READ MORE DETAIL?)**

REVISION: DID YOU REVISE? YES NO

TYPE OF REVISION: (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

ADDED DETAIL/INFO ____ DELETED INFO. ____

MADE WORD/SENTENCE CHANGES ___ MOVED SENTENCES/PARAGRAPHS_____

RATE YOUR AMOUNT OF REVISION ON A SCALE OF 1-5: _____

EDITING: DID YOU CHECK.....

PARAGRAPHS____ SPELLING____ PUNCTUATION____ GRAMMAR _____

RATE YOUR AMOUNT OF EDITING ON A SCALE OF 1 – 5: _____

TEACHER SECTION:

 # OF MISSPELLED WORDS _____

NO EVIDENCE OF REVISION _____ TOTAL POINTS: _____

NO EVIDENCE OF EDITING _____

COMMENTS:

Appendix H

SPEAK OUT!

How helpful have each of the following been to you as a writer?

GUEST SPEAKERS:

5	4	3	2	1
Very Helpful		**Somewhat Helpful**		**Not Helpful**

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

COFFEE HOUSE:

5	4	3	2	1
Very Helpful		**Somewhat Helpful**		**Not Helpful**

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

GATOR GRAFFITI:

5	4	3	2	1
Very Helpful		**Somewhat Helpful**		**Not Helpful**

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____